



Dana E. Blackwell
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LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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REVEREND G. LIND TAYLOR
DR. HARRIETTE WILLIAMS, CHAIR

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **January 26, 2004**, in room 140 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Patricia Curry
Joyce Fahey
Phalen G. Hurewitz
Helen Kleinberg
Daisy Ma
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette Williams

Trinity Wallace-Ellis, Youth Representative

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Brenda Galloway
Lily Griego
Christina S. Mattingly
Sandra Rudnick
Reverend G. Lind Taylor

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the January 26, 2003 meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes for the January 5, 2004 general meeting were held for requested amendments.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Dr. Sanders indicated that the Department has developed its five MAPP goals to be consistent with its ongoing goals to reduce timelines to permanency, decrease reliance on out of home care, and improve safety for children in care. The MAPP goals are: 1) finalize 4,000 adoptions in calendar year 2005; 2) to reduce the incidence of abuse/neglect in foster care by 20%; 3) to reduce timelines to permanency by 10%; 4) to submit the Title IV-E waiver and 5) to complete performance based contracts with the group homes.

With respect to the waiver, Dr. Sanders indicated that the most critical aspect of the waiver is the practice change that it will hopefully bring about. The primary practice change is tied to the Department's efforts toward prevention. Although the waiver will allow the Department spending flexibility, supporting families in their homes and communities will not be accomplished if staff does not think differently about how they carry this out at the front end of the system. Conversations are taking place internally to begin thinking about the practice changes that must take place.

Dr. Sanders reviewed statistical information which demonstrated the Department's outcomes related to front end investigations. The Department's examination of initial investigations was undertaken to determine whether there are significant variations in practice amongst the regional offices in an effort to develop strategies about how to better provide service. The data illustrates no significant variation in the rate of detention from office to office with the exception of the Command Post, which has a larger percentage of detentions. Dr. Sanders suggested that there may be several reasons for this 1) the Command Post is centralized and staff is not knowledgeable about available community resources; 2) during the weekend and evening hours there is more "stress" at the time of the investigation. The Department is discussing the possibility of decentralizing the Command Post and will conduct further examination of the investigative practices that take place during the weekend and evening hours. Additionally, there is variation amongst the regional offices as to the level of service offered to families when they are not detained.

Commissioner Sorkin asked if any attempt has been made to review the data by SPA rather than by regional offices suggesting that the data would look different and would assist in developing appropriate interventions if the Command Post is decentralized. She further questioned whether Structured Decision Making (SDM) was fully implemented throughout the Department. Dr. Sanders responded in the affirmative. Paul Freedlund offered to provide the Commission with a recent report that documents the implementation status of SDM.

Commissioner Curry requested that when this information is provided to the Commission in the future that a column is added reflecting the percentages of detentions in addition to the actual numbers. Dr. Sanders indicated that there is a great deal of information to be gleaned from the numbers presented and he will in the future add more specificity. Commissioner Fahey asked if the Department has a tracking system in place which reviews the investigative decisions and future outcomes with families. She suggested

that it would be important to understand whether child fatalities occur after an investigation has taken place and services were not provided. Dr. Sanders agrees that the decision making at the time of immediate response investigations needs improvement.

Discussion took place about the necessity of a warm line within the Department, particularly in connection with the Hotline, as many of the calls that come into the Hotline are not appropriate.

Dr. Sanders indicated that the Department is currently redefining the role of the 35 Public Health Nurses (PHN) under their employ. Potentially the PHNs will accompany Emergency Response workers on investigations where there is a child under a certain age. This would allow for a more thorough investigation of the family at the time of the initial investigation. The Department is currently working with the Department of Health Services (DMH) on this effort as it is consistent with their practice. Dr. Sophy is taking the lead on this initiative.

Dr. Sanders stated that the Department has begun dialogue with various law enforcement agencies in the County to discuss possible co-location of CSWs at the law enforcement agencies as there is considerable overlap of families being investigated. He indicated that Long Beach, Arcadia and the Sheriff's are interested. Future discussions will take place to determine where in the county this effort should take place. Vice Chair Biondi suggested that the Department review the Stuart House model of co-location.

Discussion about the Department's practice with respect to repeat referrals ensued. John Oppenheim indicated that the Department is currently trying to develop a profile for multiple referrals. He noted that there are commonalities regarding resource provision and the likelihood of recurrence of subsequent referrals. Dr. Sanders stated that the Department needs to begin thinking about service provision along a continuum to determine where families should be connected to maintain children safely in their homes. He noted the use of First 5 funding to implement such a practice in order to provide alternative response to families. Commissioner Fahey suggested that a protocol be developed that would provide an alternative venue for interviewing children at the time of a second referral. This protocol would also include the inclusion of a person with whom the child feels comfortable thus facilitating a more successful interview.

Dr. Sanders stated that if the Department had been utilizing SDM in the last six years in the manner in which it was designed, some of the issues about emergency response investigations and repeat referrals would not be present today. He also suggested that the Department needs to further examine the data available to determine best practice.

Commissioner Kleinberg suggested an examination of the ER detentions to determine how many of the children are under the age of five years and the number of children who are school age. This she recommended would assist in determining the number of youth who are in need of educational evaluations. She then asked if the PHNs could assist families to secure health insurance. Dr. Sanders stated that he will provide data

pertaining to subsequent referrals, and reabuse for youth in foster care at the next Commission meeting.

CHAIR'S REPORT:

- Chair Williams introduced and welcomed the Commission's current temporary staff assistant, D'Gregory Craig.
- Chair Williams recognized the resignation of Commissioner Taylor and noted that he will be moving out of California. She also recognized the informal resignation of Commissioner Griego and stated that the Commission office has not yet received a formal letter of resignation.
- Chair Williams announced the Fearless Caregiver Conference sponsored by the City of Los Angeles. The conference is free for the first 200 registrants. Chair Williams hopes that caregivers will take advantage of the opportunity.
- Chair Williams thanked and commended Judge Nash for his continued advocacy in encouraging the timeliness of adoptions.
- Chair Williams acknowledged a news article sent to each Commissioner by Supervisor Antonovich about a young man who was "given a second chance" by a foster family.
- Chair Williams asked work group chairs to meet with her at 9 am prior to the February 9th Commission meeting.
- Chair Williams brought the Commissioner's attention to the workgroup presentation schedule placed at their seats. There was no request for clarification or comment.
- Chair Williams asked that Commissioners interested in participating on a committee to plan the Commission's and the Department's 20th Anniversary to please contact her.
- Chair Williams requested from Dr. Sanders a briefing on the Department's budget at the next Commission meeting to understand how the state budget will impact the Department.

WORK GROUP REPORT – Permanency

Safe, Stable and Nurturing Families Recommendations:

Susan Kim, Children's Planning Council (CPC), provided the history of the development of the Safe, Stable and Nurturing Families recommendations. She stated that the target population was a strategic determination as permanency is usually not sought for youth age 14 years and older. While legal permanence is the preferred case plan for youth under the supervision of the Department, Ms. Kim indicated that the recommendation reflects the importance for youth to have a social and/or emotional life long connection to a caring adult. At the request of the Board Deputies, the timeline for legal permanence has been included into the recommendation. Finally, Ms. Kim added that a presentation was made to the Board of Supervisors this past week. Although the Supervisors were receptive to the recommendations, Supervisor Molina asked that the motion to accept the recommendations be held over for two weeks to provide her with more time for review.

Commissioner Kleinberg expressed her concern that the recommendations did not address the issue of sibling contact and/or reunification. Ms. Kim indicated that although

important, the recommendations were developed to build upon the current infrastructures and planning structures taking place in the county. She indicated that discussion on this particular topic be addressed in the three work groups.

Commissioner Fahey asked Dr. Sanders to clarify the placement of the 8,000 children referenced in the supporting documentation provided by Ms. Kim. Dr. Sanders stated that there approximately 8,000 – 9,000 youth age 14 and older who are receiving services from the Department, but when combined with probation youth the number increases to approximately 20,000. Amongst those children receiving services from the Department approximately 3,000 are residing with relatives, and 3,000 are in foster care homes.

Commissioner Curry suggested that the issue of siblings be better addressed by the family reunification workgroup. Chair Williams asked the Commission to consider that issues with respect to sibling contact and/or reunification are addressed in all workgroups and that the Commission adopt basic tenants to be included in the final report/recommendations. Commissioner Sorkin pointed out that legally the Department is to provide siblings with visitation while under its supervision.

Trinity Wallace-Ellis stated that the issues related to sibling contact are important at every stage. However, when the issue of family reunification is addressed most people only focus on children returning to their parents and not necessarily maintaining sibling contact. She suggested that when detention is deemed necessary, CSWs should focus on placing siblings in the same foster home. She further stated that AB1947 requires the court, judges and social workers recognize the importance of sibling relationships and make an effort to place children at the very least in the same communities to better facilitate visitation.

Commissioner Kleinberg reemphasized the importance of sibling contact and reunification and that it should be included in the recommendations. Commissioner Fahey suggested training for foster care providers and group home providers regarding the importance of sibling visitation. Commissioner Curry suggested that there needs to be a strategic way to address sibling issues. Chair Williams stated that further discussion could take place at the chairs meeting on February 9th. She also stated that we should not suggest changes to the recommendations as it is too far along in the process. Vice Chair Biondi concurred adding that the intent of the recommendation includes sibling contact.

Statewide and Local Permanency Efforts:

Pat Reynolds – Harris, Program Director California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) and former Child Welfare Director for the City and County of San Francisco, expressed her delight that the Commission and the Department are working on the issues related to permanence for older youth. Ms. Reynolds-Harris explained that the CPYP began one year ago by supporting innovative practices focused on transitioning services for youth. The studies showed poor outcomes for these youth and the most critical aspect to youths' success was a life long connection to a caring adult.

In 2002, the CPYP held a national convening and invited those organizations that had been successful in providing this service to adolescents in the child welfare system.

During the course of the convening a beginning definition for permanence was established. While some of the characteristics are not measurable, they are of importance. She indicated that two central themes emerged from the convening. First, permanency work for youth is a difficult task if the belief is that it can not be achieved. Ms. Reynolds-Harris indicated that attitudes on the part of social workers are central to what needs to change if permanence is to be accomplished. Secondly, the youth needs to be an active participant in developing their permanency planning. Talking to a youth about the significant relationships in their lives, exploring their issues related to permanence and involving them in the planning process is critical. She emphasized that a change in practice and attitudes will determine the success of providing permanence for older youth.

Ms. Reynolds-Harris stated that the CPYP is focusing their work on four counties in the state: Alameda, San Mateo, Stanislaus and Monterey. The CPYP is providing each of these counties with technical assistance to change their practices to achieve a greater rate of permanency with this population. The CPYP has developed a format to assess the barriers present in each of the counties that interfere with the achievement of permanency. The assessment for each of the counties has been completed and all of the agencies have developed and submitted a work plan to address the identified barriers. Currently, each county is in the implementation stage.

Ms. Reynolds-Harris indicated that the CPYP is working with the child welfare academies to develop a training curriculum that could be helpful to all counties in the state. This training will be provided to the workforce. Additionally, the CPYP is contracting with the Y.O.U.T.H Training developed by youth through a federal grant to help social workers learn how to talk to youth. She explained that youth provide the training and each of the counties will receive the training. Ms. Reynolds-Harris encouraged the Department to explore the possibility of providing the training to its workforce. In addition, "digital stories" are being developed to augment training.

Finally, the CPYP will publish a couple of documents to assist child welfare agencies accomplish their goals toward permanence for older youth. The first document explores the youth's perspective on permanency. The second document is about exemplary practice.

Beyond working with four child welfare jurisdictions, the CPYP convenes a task force which meets quarterly and includes representation from the various child welfare agencies, advocates and dependency courts to discuss issues related to youth permanency among other things. She noted that one of the task forces accomplishments was the passage of AB408. This year the task force is examining the disincentives toward youth permanency.

The CPYP recently received a grant to pursue the partnership objectives of the task force. She advised the Commission that as a result of the grant three workgroups will convene in February and she invited interested Commissioners to participate.

Berisha Black shared that through the work of the CPYP, youth have been able to articulate their definition of permanency and how they believe it would be most helpful for social workers to interact with them around this issue. Although it is clear that the child welfare agencies are focused on legal permanence, youth deem emotional and physical stability as a more urgent priority. Ms. Black stated that while a youth may be in a legally permanent situation, they may not be happy in the situation or feel a life long connection to those with whom they are legally bond. She encouraged broadening the definition of permanence to meet the needs of youth beyond legal mandates.

Dr. Sharon Watson, Consultant, stated that the goal for the Department coincides with that of the CPYP: that no youth leave the foster care system without a life long connection to a caring adult. Dr. Watson stated that her work will focus on developing strategies for achieving an increased rate of permanence for youth 14 years and older in Los Angeles County. She intends on examining all of the permanency efforts taking place to inform her work. She is also working with a small group of managers from the Department to further inform her work as well as the many interviews she is conducting with community stakeholders. Dr. Watson intends on making her final recommendations to Dr. Sanders some time in March 2004.

Vice Chair Biondi commented that there are no efforts to assist those foster youth who crossover into the delinquency system to make a successful transition into adulthood. Ms. Reynolds-Harris agreed that there is a critical need, yet stated that currently the efforts of the CPYP are focused on youth in the child welfare system.

Commissioner Hurewitz expressed his concern that the attitudes of some line staff are so recalcitrant that training will not make a significant difference in their practice. Ms. Reynolds-Harris commented with the four counties in the CPYP have identified staff they believe to be amenable to the project to begin the training process. Commissioner Hurewitz suggested that once the training has taken place there should be some testing to determine the extent to which the training has been successful. Pre and post test are taking place with line workers to track changes in attitude.

Miriam Krinsky, Children's Law Center (CLC), commented that AB408 is on a repeal list identified by Governor Schwarzenegger's office. The justification for possible repeal is due to an assignment of potential cost that the bill may have. Ms. Reynolds-Harris stated that the CPYP has been in contact with Assemblymember Steinberg's office. They have expressed some concern, yet because of the unanimous approval from the legislature, they are not "too worried". Ms. Krinsky suggested that groups come together to ensure that the bill is not repealed.

Additionally, Ms. Krinsky stated that supporting AB129 is a legislative attempt to bring the "crossover" back to the dependency system where they can receive transition services. Chair Williams noted the CPC permanency recommendation includes probation. Dr. Watson shared that probation is included in the workgroup to begin working on this issue.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked if education is in any way included in these permanency efforts. Ms. Reynolds stated that they do not as the focus of the CPYP is strictly on achieving permanency, yet she acknowledged the importance of education for all youth.

NEW BUSINESS

Approval of KinGAP Questionnaire: Commissioner Sorkin, Chair KinGAP subcommittee, explained that the sub-committee is surveying KinGAP recipients about their experience with this service. The Department is supporting the effort by sending out the questionnaire in the payment envelopes. The questionnaire will also be in Spanish. The sub-committee will also hold focus groups and are attempting to receive permission from the courts to do some in-person interviews. The questionnaire was unanimously approved with suggested amendments.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Gwen Bartholomew provided public comment regarding the redeployment of the Kinship Care Liaisons, stating that she believes it to be “a step back for relative providers”.
- Margaret Lipton provided public comment regarding the redeployment of the Permanency Placement Liaisons (PPL) in the Adoptions Division. She testified to the importance of the PPLs and asked the Commission to intervene.

MEETING ADJOURNED